

18. GREAT-TUFTED MYNA *ACRIDOTHERES GRANDIS* —
AN ADDITION TO THE BIRDS OF MEGHALAYA

The Great-tufted Myna *Acridotheres grandis* is also known as White-vented or Great Myna. It is distributed from northeast India to Sulawesi and Christmas Islands (Indian Ocean), while in India it was only known from Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram (Ali and Ripley 1983), which was also the westernmost limit of its range. The first record in Assam was in 1986 when it was observed at Dimbruchara in Barail Reserve Forest in North Cachar Hills district (Choudhury 1991a). Thereafter, it appeared to be visible in almost all parts of Assam (Choudhury 1991b) suggesting a case of new and notable range extension.

On July 21, 2002 while travelling to Shillong from Guwahati in northeast India with Asad Rahmani and Kulojyoti Lahkar, I saw two Great-tufted Mynas at the 14th mile area (26° 05' N, 91° 53' E) between Jorabat and Byrnihat. The time was around 1530 hrs. The birds flew from Meghalaya to Assam; that stretch of the National Highway 40 has been

marked as the interstate boundary. Although I recorded it in my notebook, I overlooked its significance as the species has become common even in Guwahati city since about one and half a decades. Subsequently, I cross-checked with records and realised that the species was never recorded in Meghalaya (Baker 1907; Choudhury 1991b, 2000; Godwin-Austen 1870a,b, 1872; Grimmett *et al.* 1998). The habitat was foothills in Meghalaya (Ri-Bhoi district), while it was a small, cultivated valley on Assam side (in Kamrup district) with human habitations and shops along the busy national highway.

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19. AN OBSERVATION OF MATE SELECTION IN THE HOUSE CROW
CORVUS SPLENDENS: AN APPARENT INSTANCE
OF MODIFIED LEKKING IN A CORVID

Introduction

Corvids are a wide ranging and diverse group of birds. Often considered the most intelligent of birds, their social systems are highly varied. Perhaps because of the general ease with which they can be observed the behaviour of the corvids has been studied extensively. Corvids have proven especially important in the study of intelligence (Welty 1979; Gill 1995) and breeding behaviour (Skutch 1976). Mate selection is one of the most critical components of any social structure and corvids are known to be fussy about the mates that they select. Many extensive studies of breeding behaviour in corvids have been conducted [Ratcliffe 1997 (ravens); Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick 1984 (Florida Scrub-Jay); Yeates 1934 (Rook); Marzluff and Balda 1992 (Pinyon

Jay); Kilham 1989 (American Crow and Northern Raven)]. It has been generally observed that these birds form close pair bonds (Angell 1978; Goodwin 1986) and many species mate for life. Goodwin (1986) notes that "for all species whose behaviour is reasonably well known breeding adults live in pairs" and that ritual feeding of the female by the male is a common part of the mating ritual in many species. Here we report an observation of breeding behaviour in the House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) that represents some certain deviations from the known norm of corvid behaviour and is unusual for birds in general.

Although no monograph on them has been written, House Crows have been studied extensively, primarily because of the ease with which they can be observed. House